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XII.—WORDSWORTH'S EYE

The poetry of Wordsworth seems, at first thought, to draw less from the visual sense than that of Milton, or Shelley, or Keats, or many another.¹ For Wordsworth's manner is not a pictorial manner; his poetic methods are not those of the artist; he was no searcher out of the striking; and beauty, as commonly understood, was not to him the supreme inspiration.

Those who are not of the company of true believers will assent with warmth to these observations; but will not, perhaps, be so ready to admit that other manners, methods, and inspirations may be as truly poetic, as rich in the life-giving power which is the final test of poetry. This power in Wordsworth's is in fact derived in remarkable measure from the faculty of the eye. How peculiarly it is so can be only roughly and partially outlined here; the body of his work is the full testimony. Such a sketch, again, however desirable, could hardly be made at all but for one circumstance, sole encouragement of the rash attempter. This is the immensely important fact that Wordsworth, especially in his *Prelude*, letting us, more fully, perhaps, than any other poet, into the secrets of the poetic consciousness, has revealed and opened out to us as no one else, however rich in visual imagery, the peculiar function of the eye.²

Critics of the poet have noticed his "eye-mindedness."

¹ The author gratefully acknowledges her debt to Professor A. C. Bradley for his invaluable advice in the arrangement of this paper.

² It is not intended here to speak of Wordsworth's interest in such visual perceptions as form, mass, motion, light, and colour, but only to consider his faculty of sight in itself, and the relation in him of physical to poetical or spiritual vision.

M. Legouis³ remarks that "his poems contain practically nothing that did not come to him either through hearing or through sight," and, while not emphasizing the dominance of eye over ear, as does Professor Harper, in his recent *Life of Wordsworth*, he observes that the poet was "entirely wanting in ear for music," was "long unable to distinguish one air from another," and called Coleridge "a perfect epicure of sounds." M. Legouis has also commented on the apparent weakness of another sense: "His flowers have no scent. He did not breathe those 'soul-dissolving odours' so dear to Shelley. Roses are seldom met with in his poetry, their fragrance scarcely once." It has even been said that Wordsworth was entirely without the sense of smell.⁴ It is certain that his poetry has nothing of all those odours of the earth, as of autumn woods, or of breaking sea-spray, or of spring rains on young growing things, which it seems should have been to him, as to so many of her lovers they are, an important part of the joy in Nature. The discovery of the nose as an organ of romance is indeed modern; but it is scarcely credible that the dignities of Wordsworth's period alone could have suppressed every mention of its delights, when we remember that he held spades, donkeys, and even wash-tubs fit subjects of verse. At any rate, "the sumptuous splendour of colour and perfume which ravished Keats and stimulated Shelley," Professor Herford has remarked,⁵ only impeded the imagination of Wordsworth.

³ *The Early Days of William Wordsworth, 1770-1798.*

⁴ It must be noted, however, that in a letter to "Christopher North," he declares that "no human being can be so besotted and debased . . . as to be utterly insensible to the colours, forms, or smell of flowers, the voices and motions of birds and beasts," and many other appearances of Nature.

⁵ *The Age of Wordsworth*, p. 159.

Whether the visible world projected itself more sharply, richly, insistently, upon the eye of Wordsworth than upon that of Dante, Milton, Keats, or Shelley, we cannot know; but from what he tells us we do know that his visual impressions were of a very special intensity, and such as come to few beholders on this earth. "The bodily eye" he calls "in every stage of life the most despotic of our senses," and speaks of "these visual orbs" as "inconceivably endowed." He tells what delight of the eye he knew when, a child of ten, he drank in

a pure
Organic pleasure from the silver wreaths
Of curling mist, or from the level plain
Of waters coloured by impending clouds.

And, when the moon was rising, though a boy, untouched as yet by fancy, or by any association of "peculiar sense of quietness or peace," "yet have I stood," he says,

Even while mine eye hath moved o'er many a league
Of shining water, gathering, as it seemed,
Through every hair-breadth in that field of light,
New pleasure like a bee among the flowers.

In youth, in the days when "the sounding cataract haunted" him "like a passion,"

the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite, a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.

And he speaks of the "aching joys," and "dizzy raptures" of that time. Familiar as are these lines, how many readers, even lovers of them, fully realise what they reveal of organic sensibility, of intensity of function, of a state

approaching possession,—a word which the poet himself used for his seeing?

Wordsworth has most fully set forth, in the first book of the *Excursion*, the “power of a peculiar eye,” and its spiritual development, in boyhood; a description which, though professedly of the Wanderer, we cannot doubt to be autobiographical, because Wordsworth confessed the Pedlar to be “what I fancied my own character might have become in his circumstances,” and because it agrees with the poet’s known experiences.

The foundations of his mind laid in solitary communion with Nature, “not from terror free,” while yet a child he had perceived the presence and power of greatness,

and deep feeling had impressed
So vividly great objects that they lay
Upon his mind like substances, whose presence
Perplexed the bodily sense. He had received
A precious gift, for, as he grew in years,
With these impressions would he still compare
All his remembrances, thoughts, shapes, and forms,
And, being still unsatisfied with aught
Of dimmer character, he thence attained
An active power to fasten images
Upon his brain, and on their pictured lines
Intensely brooded, even till they acquired
The liveliness of dreams. Nor did he fail,
While yet a child, with a child’s eagerness
Incessantly to turn his ear and eye
On all things which the moving seasons brought
To feed such appetite.

This, then, is Wordsworth’s own account of the astonishing origin and development of the visualising faculty which was so remarkable in itself and so strikingly characteristic of him. His power of seeing again in memory what had impressed eye and mind, all his readers have met, in its gentler aspect,—that “inward eye, which is the bliss of solitude,” “seeing by internal light,” reviving

with a flash sights of beauty, forbidding past experience to become "as is a landscape to a blind man's eye." But this power had also its aspect of force and intensity, corresponding to those of the original seeing. He says of a child that a half-hour's roam "through imperial bowers" and pleasure-gardens

Would leave behind a dance of images
That shall break in upon his sleep for weeks.

Of those mourning the beloved dead he writes

Deem not
 that having ceased to see
[With bodily eyes, they are borne down by love
Of what is lost, and perish through regret.
Oh! no, the innocent Sufferer often sees
Too clearly, feels too vividly, and longs
To realise the vision, with intense
And ever-constant yearning: there—there lies
The excess, by which the balance is destroyed.

The scenes and objects Wordsworth saw in childhood and early youth became, through this vividness of visual memory, a lifelong possession. A strong, healthy boy, he delighted in all the boisterous sports of his comrades; fortunately for the world, the rowing, riding, and skating were done amid the society also of the lakes and mountains. Thus, when the "vulgar joy," as he calls it, wore away,

The scenes which were a witness of that joy
Remained in their substantial lineaments
Depicted on the brain, and to the eye
Were visible, a daily sight.

In moments of wildest boyish fun

 the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind,
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received
Into the bosom of the steady lake.

Skating at evening, on Esthwaite Water,

When we had given our bodies to the wind,
And all the shadowy banks on either side
Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still
The rapid line of motion, then at once,
Have I, reclining back upon my heels,
Stopped short; yet still the solitary cliffs
Wheeled by me—even as if the earth had rolled
With visible motion her diurnal round!
Behind me did they stretch in solemn train,
Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watched
Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep.

We may believe that the young William was not the only one of that “noisy crew” who experienced something of this visual illusion; but as no other could have given it such expression, on no other, either, could it have descended with the force which causes the poet, perhaps fifteen years later, immediately after recording it, to burst into one of his great apostrophes of wonder and awe toward Nature who has so ministered to him. Another famous episode of his childhood drew its power from a visual impression not strictly, but almost, an illusion. The peak seen from the boat taken stealthily by night, that spectacle which caused his brain “for many days” to work “with a dim and undetermined sense of unknown modes of being,” so that “huge and mighty forms, that do not live like living men,” “moved slowly through the mind by day, and were a trouble to [his] dreams,”—this “spectacle” appeared as he rowed upon the silent lake:

When, from behind that craggy steep, till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct,
Upreared its head. I struck, and struck again,
And growing still in stature, the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me.

Thus, in the earlier pages of the *Prelude*, Wordsworth is "sedulous to trace"

How Nature by extrinsic passion first
Peopled the mind with forms sublime or fair,
And made me love them.

His mind became indeed a "mansion for all lovely forms." At Cambridge, he took "pleasure quiet and profound" in the study of geometry, because

Mighty is the charm
Of those abstractions to a mind beset
With images, and haunted by herself.

In the ninth book of the *Prelude* is a long passage describing the busy play of fancies in his brain at this period; such fancies as fill the second poem to the daisy (1802), when

wilful Fancy, in no hurtful mood
Engrafted far-fetched shapes on feelings bred
By pure Imagination.

More important than this playfulness of the mind is the habit he describes of bodying forth figures of fancy or romance, with a living force rare even among poets. For

Scarcely Spenser's self
Could have more tranquil visions in his youth,
Or could more bright appearances create
Of human forms with superhuman powers,
Than I beheld, loitering on calm clear nights
Alone, beneath this fairy work of earth—

an ivy-wreathed ash-tree at Cambridge, under which he would stand "foot-bound, up-looking," "beneath a frosty moon." When, at the boy's first going to school, a drowned man was taken from the water of Esthwaite, "a spectre-shape of terror,"

no soul-debasing fear,
Young as I was, a child not nine years old,

Possessed me, for my inner eye had seen
Such sights before, among the shining streams
Of faery land, the forest of romance.
Their spirit hallowed the sad spectacle
With decoration of ideal grace;
A dignity, a smoothness, like the works
Of Grecian art, and purest poesy.

Walking alone on Salisbury Plain, he "saw our dim ancestral Past in vision clear," in "a waking dream, a reverie" of Briton and Druid, so vivid that with "believing eyes" he beheld, all about him, long-bearded teachers with white wands pointing to starry sky and plain below, sweet sounds of music accompanying.

Wordsworth's eye thus created for him a discipline through which he learned to dwell with images of beauty and romance, and experienced the power of art to purify the ugly things of life; a discipline, too, which saved him, by the acquired wealth of that eye, from the sickliness or unreality common to immature poets. For

'mid the fervent swarms
Of these vagaries, with an eye so rich
As mine was, through the bounty of a grand
And lovely region, I had forms distinct
To steady me; each airy thought revolved
Round a substantial centre, which at once
Incited it to motion, and controlled.

But the original keenness, the strong retentiveness, of physical vision which made these benefits possible, were also the foundation of a fuller vision, which was not of the sense alone. The phase of Wordsworth's development now to be treated shows, from his own contrasting of it with former experience, how closely heart and imagination had been involved with the eye's delight.

Wordsworth's bitter disappointment in the results of the French Revolution, on which his opening manhood had

staked its dearest hopes, vitiating all his mind, left an impress upon "imagination and taste," the history of whose impairment and cure forms the subject of the concluding books of his great autobiographical poem. At this period the visual faculty became indeed his tyrant. His imaginative power suffered, he explains, through "presumption"; he was

even in pleasure pleased
Unworthily, disliking here, and there
Liking; by rules of mimic art transferred
To things above all art;—

but still more (and here comes a hint of the jealous eye)
by

giving way
To a comparison of scene with scene,
Bent overmuch on superficial things,
Pampering myself with meagre novelties
Of colour and proportion; to the moods
Of time and season, to the moral power,
The affections and the spirit of the place,
Insensible. . . .

What follows this is most interesting and significant:

Nor only did the love
Of sitting thus in judgment interrupt
My deeper feelings, but another cause,
More subtle and less easily explained,
That almost seems inherent in the creature,
A twofold frame of body and of mind.
I speak in recollection of a time
When the bodily eye, in every stage of life
The most despotic of our senses, gained
Such strength in me as often held my mind
In absolute dominion.

He suggests that Nature, to thwart this tyranny, studiously employs all the senses to counteract one another—

But leave we this; enough that my delights
(Such as they were) were sought insatiably.

Vivid the transport, vivid though not profound;
 I roamed from hill to hill, from rock to rock,
 Still craving combinations of new forms,
 New pleasure, wider empire for the sight,
 Proud of her own enjoyments, and rejoiced
 To lay the inner faculties asleep.

And he adds that "as we grow up, such thralldom of the sense seems hard to shun."^{5a}

If at this point we recall the youth who "like a roe"

bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
 Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
 Wherever Nature led: more like a man
 Flying from something that he dreads, than one
 Who sought the thing he loved,—

we shall at once feel the change and loss. Yet Wordsworth in this very passage declares that the "appetite" which then possessed him for the colours and forms of Nature had no need of thought, or "any interest unborrowed from the eye." But if anything is true of Wordsworth, it is that in youth, as always, his physical vision was, normally, bound up with spiritual powers. In this same passage, indeed, we must feel them, in its rapture and awe. And he exclaims, at another time, "What visionary powers of eye and soul in youth were mine!" In the apparent contradiction of the *Tintern Abbey* passage, then, the poet re-

^{5a} An apt illustration of this saying, from one who has lost the sense of sight, occurs in the *Red Cross Magazine*, April, 1919, p. 60. Sir Arthur Pearson tells his "interviewer": "It is astonishing, really, how much of a man's life is automatic, depending on sight. A man . . . really is active most of his life through his eyes. He lets the other senses use themselves, and the eye suppresses most of them. I might say that he lets the eyes do everything and the mind very little; for he sees without actually perceiving. Well, in a blind man the other senses get a chance to exercise themselves, he has conscious perception through them. And of course, at first, that is a great mental strain."

turned in memory to a phase in which, though thought and feeling were present, they were not distinct to consciousness from the visual impression, which in its ardour and first fine careless rapture, appeared all in all.

That ardour, indeed, is present even in the period of vitiation. The vivid delight, the insatiability of the eye's demand, the despotism of the sense of sight, "proud of her own endowments," all testify to that force in Wordsworth of the visual faculty which it seems clear we do not usually appreciate, since so sympathetic a critic as Professor C. H. Herford refers to this "tyranny of the eye" as "mere observation," which his sister's "exquisite regard for common things . . . helped to transform . . . into imaginative vision."⁶

One more picture of Wordsworth's youthful experience shows him in the character of "the imaginary Scot of the *Excursion*" (*Ex.*, book 1),

o'erpowered
By Nature; by the turbulence subdued
Of his own mind; by mystery and hope,
And the first virgin passion of a soul
Communing with the glorious universe.

Failing to find the repose and peace he asked in thought and intellectual abstraction,

he scanned the laws of light
Amid the roar of torrents, where they send
From hollow clefts up to the clearer air
A cloud of mist that, smitten by the sun,
Varies its rainbow hues,—

"a true picture," says De Quincey, "of Wordsworth attempting to silence the mighty battery of his impassioned heart"; and attempting it by an effort—vain, as the poet

⁶ *The Age of Wordsworth*, p. 150.

tells us—to divert the stream of power to that master-sense of seeing.

Such is, roughly, the history of Wordsworth's eye as a fine and powerful organ; an organ without whose unusual endowment we should undoubtedly have lost more than anyone can estimate of what is most characteristic in his work. Before passing to another view of the subject, let us call up, as well as may be, the physical appearance of his eyes, so strikingly described by several of the contemporaries who were so happy as to see them.

"It is agreed by all who have described Wordsworth," says M. Legouis, "that the expression of his eyes was rather of the seer than of the artist. Hazlitt tells us that there was a fire in his eye as if he saw something in objects more than the outward appearance. De Quincey had seen his eyes 'after a long day's toil in walking, . . . assume an appearance the most solemn and spiritual that it is possible for the human eye to wear. The light that resides in them seems to come from unfathomed depths [; in fact, it is more truly entitled to be held "the light that never was on land or sea," a light radiating from some far spiritual world, than any the most idealising that ever yet a painter's hand created].' So, too, Leigh Hunt: 'Certainly I never beheld eyes that looked so inspired or supernatural. They were like fires half burning, half smouldering, with a sort of acrid fixity of regard. . . . One might imagine Ezekiel or Isaiah to have had such eyes.'"⁷

Of the nature of the seeing that was done with those eyes one aspect has been shown; we are now to examine another; to look for the relation in Wordsworth of physical to poetic or spiritual vision.

The period of degradation, of the eye's deliberate quest of its own gratification, was transient. For, says the poet,

⁷ *The Early Days of William Wordsworth*, p. 460.

I had known
 Too forcibly, too early in my life,
 Visitings of imaginative power
 For this to last; I shook the habit off
 Entirely and forever, and again
 In Nature's presence stood, as now I stand,
 A sensitive being, a creative soul.

He became once more as in early youth, when he rejoiced
 with the soul of Nature

before the winds
 And roaring waters, and in lights and shades
 That marched and countermarched about the hills
 In glorious apparition, Powers on whom
 I daily waited, now all eye, and now
 All ear, but never long without the heart
 Employed, and man's unfolding intellect.

This is the true note of Wordsworth's youthful vision; a
 note which sounds again when he cries

Ye Presences of Nature in the sky,
 And on the earth! Ye Visions of the hills!
 And Souls of lonely places! can I think
 A vulgar hope was yours when you employed
 Such ministry, when ye, through many a year
 Haunting me thus among my boyish sports,
 On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
 Impressed upon all forms, the characters
 Of danger or desire; and thus did make
 The surface of the universal earth,
 With triumph and delight, with hope and fear,
 Work like a sea?

Through vision, again, he passed at times into a still
 deeper region of experience, transcending this perfect bal-
 ance of heart and eye, and remote by the full circle's
 breadth from the state where the power of the eye "laid
 the inner faculties asleep," a region where the eye's eager
 delight was subdued by a mightier passion, where sense
 was lost in spirit.

For the growing Youth,
What soul was his, when, from the naked top
Of some bold headland, he beheld the sun
Rise up, and bathe the world in light! He looked—
Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth,
And ocean's liquid mass, in gladness lay
Beneath him: Far and wide the clouds were touched,
And in their silent faces could he read
Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank
The spectacle; sensation, soul, and form,
All melted into him; they swallowed up
His animal being; in them did he live;
And by them did he live; they were his life.
In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.

Wordsworth's seeing thus has, besides the morbid, transient phase of deliberate and exclusive pleasing of the eye, three normal "manners"; a passionate absorption in forms and colours which leaves no room for conscious thought; the equipoise of eye's delight with full activity of both thought and feeling; and the attainment, through sense-perception, immediate or remembered, to an impassioned contemplation where conscious thought again disappears, lost in the deepening tide of joy or wonder.

The great visionary hours of the third manner are not always of the same character. They may be hours of stillness, reached through a calm and gradual process,—

that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul.

Thus it was when, as a boy, he would go often at dawn, to sit, he says,

among the woods
 Alone upon some jutting eminence,
 At the first gleam of dawn-light, when the Vale,
 Yet slumbering, lay in utter solitude.
 How shall I seek the origin? where find
 Faith in the marvellous things which then I felt?
 Oft in these moments such a holy calm
 Would overspread my soul, that bodily eyes
 Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw
 Appeared like something in myself, a dream,
 A prospect in the mind.^{1a}

When he tells of roaming, at Cambridge, "among men and shops," "delighted with the motley spectacle," though in a "loose and careless mood," there is still, in the line

I was the Dreamer, they the Dream,

a trace of this same visionary state.

But not always in this sort was his existence "*possessed*," to use his own emphasised phrase. "Gleams of soul-illumination" would descend upon him with an overwhelming suddenness which he likens to a "flash." "I felt," he says,

Gleams like the flashing of a shield:—the earth
 And common face of Nature spake to me
 Rememberable things.

The glory and greatness of the human spirit are made known to him in moments of almost paralysing force of onrush,

when the light of sense
 Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
 The invisible world.

^{1a} Sir Walter Raleigh (*Wordsworth*, pp. 66-7) says in connection with the above passage, "It was a kind of possession through the eye that became the type of poetic inspiration to him, a possession nowhere better described than in" the lines in question. The whole paragraph from which this sentence is taken bears upon the subject.

Wordsworth's visualising power, we have seen, built up in his brain a world of images, the storehouse of his poetry, the solace of his mind. What we have now to observe is, that his eye was not only passive and receptive, but creative. His habit, already described, of "bodying forth" images of fancy and romance, so vividly that they seemed actually present to the bodily eye, discovers a relation of eye and mind in creative activity. And this relation, of imagination bodying forth the forms of things unknown, the giving of outward life, more or less real, to inward conceptions, would appear to be the more usual path of creative power in poets. Wordsworth's characteristic path was different, it may be said, opposite; for in his most distinctive thinking, as well as in the work which most truly expresses him, what he created entered his mind from without, commonly through the eye. That is, in his "mighty world of eye and ear,—both what they half create, and what perceive," creation grows from perception; it is no extraneous invention, but actually, in the last analysis, an enlarged, illumined perception, bringing out forms or meanings which, though to the ordinary observer invisible, are all the time really there. "A plastic power abode with me," he says; sometimes "rebellious," "a local spirit of his own," but in general "strictly subservient" to the course of the actual external world with which it communed.

Consciously creating, he was conscious, also, that what he created was part of Nature, that the mind's creative power is akin to hers:

I felt that the array
Of act and circumstance and visible form,
Is mainly to the pleasure of the mind
What passion makes them; that meanwhile the forms
Of Nature have a passion in themselves,

That intermingles with those works of man
To which she summons him.

The poet's field is "wherever Nature leads"; he, as seer and discoverer, is her co-worker—

Nature for all conditions wants not power
To consecrate, if we have eyes to see,
The outside of her creatures, and to breathe
Grandeur upon the very humblest face
Of human life.

Through such seeing does the poet become a creative power,—“the humblest of this band”

Have each his own peculiar faculty,
Heaven's gift, a sense that fits him to perceive
Objects unseen before
An insight that in some sort he possesses,
A privilege whereby a work of his,
Proceeding from a source of untaught things,
Creative and enduring, may become
A power like one of Nature's.

And of himself, thus “standing by Nature's side,” he says,

an auxiliar light
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
Bestowed new splendour; the melodious birds,
The fluttering breezes, fountains that run on
Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed
A like dominion, and the midnight storm
Grew darker in the presence of my eye.

The creative faculty in Wordsworth was deeply rooted in the perception of what he calls “analogies,”—relations between the life of Nature and the life of the mind. With his worst pedestrian amble, he conducts us into acquaintance with a habit highly poetic in itself, and most important to be understood:—

I still had loved
The exercise and produce of a toil,

Than analytic industry to me
 More pleasing, and whose character I deem
 Is more poetic, as resembling more
 Creative agency. The song would speak
 Of that interminable building reared
 By observation of affinities
 In objects where no brotherhood exists
 To passive minds.

At the age of seventeen,

whether from this habit rooted now
 So deeply in my mind, or from excess
 In the great social principle of life
 Coercing all things into sympathy,
 To unorganic natures were transferred
 My own enjoyments; or the power of truth
 Coming in revelation, did converse
 With things that really are; I, at this time,
 Saw blessings spread around me like a sea.

And he goes on to say that he had received so much from
 Nature that he was content only

when with bliss ineffable
 I felt the sentiment of Being spread
 O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still;
 O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought
 And human knowledge, to the human eye
 Invisible, yet liveth to the heart;
 O'er all that leaps and runs, and shouts and sings,
 Or beats the gladsome air. . . .

At Cambridge, where he sought and won little of the glory
 reserved for students of the accepted branches of knowl-
 edge, he continued his own pursuit of wisdom:

I was mounting now
 To such community with highest truth—
 A track pursuing, not untrod before,
 By strict analogies by thought supplied
 Or consciousnesses not to be subdued,
 To every natural form, rock, fruits, or flower,
 Even the loose stones that cover the highway,

I gave a moral life: I saw them feel,
 Or linked them to some feeling: the great mass
 Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all
 That I beheld respired with inward meaning. . . .
 I had a world about me—'twas my own;
 I made it, for it only lived to me,
 And to the God who sees into the heart.

Here was the fuller and more conscious development of the power which in boyhood had enabled him to read in the silent faces of the clouds "unutterable love"; which had grown in him while

many an hour in caves forlorn,
 And 'mid the hollow depths of naked crags
 He sate, and even in their fixed lineaments,
 Or from the power of a peculiar eye,
 Or by creative feeling overborne,
 Or by predominance of thought oppressed,
 Even in their fixed and steady lineaments
 He traced an ebbing and a flowing mind,
 Expression ever varying!

These sympathies worked so strongly in him that when, though rarely, they were betrayed by outward looks and gestures, "some called it madness!" And so it was, he continues,

If prophecy be madness; if things viewed
 By poets in old times, and higher up
 By the first men, earth's first inhabitants,
 May in these tutored days no more be seen
 With undisordered sight.

But what he saw in such moods was neither the figment of a fervid brain, nor a vague fantasy; but something really there to be seen, though invisible to others; something clearly apprehended through the bodily eye, busy with definite forms,—“lines of difference,” as he says;

It was no madness, for my bodily eye
 Amid my strongest workings evermore
 Was searching out the lines of difference

As they lie hid in all eternal forms,
 Near or remote, minute or vast; an eye
 Which from a tree, a stone, a withered leaf,
 To the broad ocean and the azure heavens
 Spangled with kindred multitudes of stars,
 Could find no surface where its power might sleep;
 Which spake perpetual logic to my soul,
 And by an unrelenting agency
 Did bind my feelings even as in a chain.

Thus does Wordsworth himself link his eye, "so richly endowed," with his peculiar creative power, and unmistakably explain the relation between his physical sight and the vision of his soul. And he cries, shaken by a sense of the fateful character of such vision,

O Heaven! how awful is the might of souls
 And what they do within themselves while yet
 The yoke of earth is new to them!

How strong was the power that so moved him is betrayed in a sonnet written in a light and graceful vein,—

How sweet it is, when mother Fancy rocks
 The wayward brain, to saunter in a wood,

where even amid green arbours, and "wild rose tip-toe upon hawthorn stocks" the divine urgency comes upon him with the force even of terror:—

thoughts link by link
 Enter through ears and eyesight with such gleam
 Of all things, that at last in fear I shrink,
 And leap at once from the delicious stream.

The true mystics, we are told, see always in a vivid clearness of detail the sights revealed to them. "A spirit and a vision are not," says Blake, "as the modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour or a nothing; they are organised and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce. He who does

not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light, than his perishing mortal eye can see, does not imagine at all." But such vision has not usually, it would seem, so intimate a connection with the activity of the eye as in Wordsworth. The visions, for instance, which Dante so minutely describes in the *Vita Nuova*, in all their sharp particularity of colour, outline, and gesture, came to him sometimes when his eyes were closed in sleep, and always, apparently, without immediate external stimulus. But Wordsworth's visionary state usually depends on, and directly arises from, something objective, perceived at times by the ear, but far more often by the eye.

His characteristic visionary power, thus, lies not in the seeing of "supernatural" forms, but in the discovery, in natural ones, of an inward and vital spirit, hidden from passive eyes. His Druids, and his Spenserian forms with more than human powers, however vivid, were no such realities to him as the thoughts lying too deep for tears which the meanest flower could give; as the glorified figure of the mountain shepherd, a giant in the fog, or "flashing" forth under a sudden radiance of sunset; or as those "great allies" of the betrayed patriot, powers that shall work for him in earth, and air, and skies, and even in the common wind, whose least breathing shall not forget him.

In Wordsworth's "analogies," "an unrelenting agency," a consciousness "not to be subdued," linked for him material forms with a moral life, an inward meaning, and showed him "the surface of the universal earth with triumph and delight, with hope and fear, working like a sea." Further possessed, he experienced bewilderment and perplexity, troublings of the spirit, passing into awe,—

those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,

Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realized. . . .

Kindled into perhaps a fuller mystic communion (not to imply that this mood either followed in time or surpassed in importance the troubled one, which is especially characteristic of Wordsworth, and lights up for us more of his individual quality) he beheld in man and Nature the original realities, the "ideas" of which material forms are but the passing shows. He "did converse with things that really are." The forms of earth became a transparent veil for the mysteries they obscure. Then it is, he says, that, asleep in body, and become a living soul,

with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

To see into the life of things! this is indeed the power of Wordsworth. And it is so notwithstanding that he saw, really, more than he was always able fully to convey. For "he attributed," says M. Legouis, "to certain expressions or incidents more emotion than other people could reasonably associate with them." And Sir Walter Raleigh remarks that "to the end of his days Wordsworth, remembering the exuberance of his own delight in the composition of it, was unable to conceive how the *Idiot Boy* should fail to arouse the same feeling in every reader." He returns, in such poems as this and *Peter Bell*, from little-visited regions of the mind, babbling like an inarticulate child of wonders which he seems to himself to be richly describing; his auditors, puzzled, however, too seldom gather from his broken inadequate phrases anything but food for mirth.

But when, in his great hours, insight and expression

are at one, we are caught up, in our own measure, into the vision of him who saw, in rocks and trees, and even the loose stones of the road, life, seeing them linked in the universal chain, bedded in a quickening soul; who in ordinary unnoticed acts of men, or happenings of Nature, lighted by some mysterious flash, or shining through glorified air as harvest of the quiet eye, saw the primal, poetic truth which is indeed of all things their life.

MARIAN MEAD.